DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 278 641 SP 028 539

AUTHOR Abel, Frederick J.; And Others
TITLE Enhancing the Effectiveness of Cooperating Teachers.
PUB DATE 17 Feb 86
NOTE 15p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association of Teacher Educators (67th, Houston, TX, February 15-18, 1987).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Classroom Observation Techniques; *Cooperating Teachers; Elementary Secondary Education; Feedback; Higher Education; *Inservice Teacher Education; *Student Teachers; Teacher Certification; Teacher Effectiveness; *Teacher Evaluation; Teacher Improvement; *Teacher Student Relationship

ABSTRACT

The area of concern addressed in this paper was the effectiveness of the cooperating teacher in the student teaching process. It was felt that the cooperating teachers were not providing enough formal observational feedback to student teachers in the area of methodology. This paper describes a workshop to respond to that stated concern. It was designed to be a one credit, field-based course which could be carried to cooperating teachers using a Friday evening and all day Saturday format. The outcome was to have cooperating teachers understand how the student teaching experience could be a culmination of the knowledge and skills learned during the years spent in teacher preparation. Components of the workshop included research findings on effective teaching, designing and using an observation instrument, conferencing and feedback and a series of idea exchanges. It is our hope that, in the future, only those teachers who have completed the workshop will be allowed to work with our student teachers. It will serve as a basis for certification of cooperating teachers. (Author)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED278641

ENHANCING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF COOPERATING TEACHERS

Dr. Frederick J. Abel, Associate Professor
Montana State University
Bozeman, Montana

Dr. Dennis Ausel, Assistant Professor
Indiana University of Pennsylvania
Indiana, Pennsylvania

Dr. James G. Hauwiller, Associate Professor
Montana State University
Bozeman, Montana

Dr. Ervin F. Sparapani, Assistant Professor
Saginaw Valley State College
University Center, Michigan

A paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association of Teacher Educators, Houston, Texas, February 17, 1987

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

F. Abel

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

SP 028 539

INTRODUCTION

Someone once said of this state something which applies equally well to Montana. Bob Hope, after a visit to Texas, observed that "Texas was wonderful. It had miles and miles of ...miles and miles." So it can be said of our state, Montana.

The teacher education program at Montana State does face a reality of vast distances which separate the university from the student teachers and cooperating teachers. As a consequence, contact is difficult and communication is limited. Cooperating teachers seem to need information about the university program their student teachers have followed and the university needs feedback from the schools. The student teaching experience should be a continuation of training closely linked to what came before it in the teacher education program. That contact, communication and continuity had been lacking.

We developed this course to respond to those needs. It was conceived to be a one credit field course which could be carried to the cooperating teachers. The College of Education helped pay some of the cost of the course so it became quite attractive to teachers. It has been offered four times thus far using a Friday evening and all day Saturday format.

The intended outcome was to have the cooperating teachers understand how the student teaching experience could be a culmination of the knowledge and skills learned during the years spent in teacher preparation. It was also apparent that teachers could benefit from more knowledge and skill in supervising the students. Ultimately, it was hoped that with a large number of teachers receiving the course it might be established as a requirement before a student teacher could be assigned. Montana like other states has toyed with the idea of establishing a certification program for cooperating teachers but unlike other states it has never enacted any legislation.

Initially, the design committee, composed of university personnel involved in student teaching and instructional technology, met to decide what should be included in the workshop. We quickly realized that we needed the insights and expertise of the cooperating teachers who work with our student teachers. Twice, the committee invited panels of experienced cooperating teachers for discussions on the needs of cooperating teachers and to plan the workshop. The final format for the workshop was developed in a series of subsequent meetings and it was decided that it was to be open only to experienced cooperating teachers who had worked with MSU student teachers.

Components which were included were the following:

- pre-workshop assignments which were completed by the participant within the week before the workshop.

- participants were given a charge to review and reflect upon some research based findings on effective teaching.

- motivation and instruction on designing an observation instrument. Participants were then asked to develop observation instrument of their own. Several instruments were offered as examples.

- participants using the observation instrument they devised viewed two taped vignettes of student teachers and analyzed their teaching. Following the observation, a simulated conferencing and feedback session was held.

- a series of idea exchanges were interspersed throughout to provide a change of pace and to give participants an opportunity to talk about their experiences in working with student teachers.

- the workshop concluded with a discussion of areas of mutual concern for teachers and university personnel.

EFFECTIVE TEACHING OVERVIEW

Making a direct translation from research findings into practice is difficult. In planning the workshop we felt compelled to be guided by research but were unsure how to make a link between esoteric findings and something which cooperating teachers could translate into advice or guidance for their student teachers. We settled upon an exercise in which we tried to focus attention on research findings without suggesting that the findings were prescriptive of specific practice. The exercise involved a series of statements which were conclusions based on research. Participants were given opportunity to judge if the assertions about practice were consistent with higher achievement, unrelated to achievement or negatively related to higher achievement. After they had made their best guess they were given a summary of "Effective School Practices: A Research Synthesis" prepared under the Onward to Excellence project (Northwest Regional Education Laboratory). They could compare their responses against the conclusions reported by the NREL. Participants were then clustered into small groups to exchange views and interpretations of the experience. We hoped that the short session would provoke

some interest and thought. An extensive bibliography was provided which could be used for follow-up on specific interests.

OBSERVATION INSTRUMENT

Cooperating teachers must be skilled at giving positive, constructive feedback to their student teachers, and should be aware that this feedback should involve both content and methodology. Our experiences working with cooperating teachers and especially our discussions with student teachers told us, however, that cooperating teachers usually gave student teachers considerable feedback on content, but very little feedback about methodology. Further, we learned that the feedback which was given was often casual and haphazard in that the cooperating teachers seldom conducted formal conferencing. These ideas are supported in the research by Copas (1984) on the cooperating teachers' role and responsibilities. Cooperating teachers performed lower in the areas of observation and feedback about teaching and providing interaction through formal conferences than they did in the areas of orienting and inducting student teachers to schools and school systems.

In planning the Pre-Observation (Designing the Instrument) and Observation (Using the Instrument) sessions, our discussions centered on the responsibility of cooperating teachers to provide formal feedback to student teachers on a regular, i.e., weekly basis. It was our

belief that cooperating teachers wanted to provide the feedback necessary for continued development of the student teachers. However, they didn't seem to know how to use the observation guides provided by the university even though they were reviewed in detail by the university supervisors, or did not want to use them. Cooperating teachers seemed unwilling to give feedback beyond some casual discussion relative to the content of lessons. We wanted to change that. Consequently, we had cooperating teachers construct observation instruments that they understood and hopefully were more committed to use. We felt that the cooperating teachers would implement an observation guide that they designed because they would better understand the criteria upon which it was based.

PRE-OBSERVATION: DESIGNING THE INSTRUMENT

The "Designing the Instrument" session was conducted in five steps.

Step One

Workshop participants were presented with guidelines and descriptive criteria for an observation instrument. Briefly, the session presiders explained that the observation instrument was not to be used for evaluation, although it could be used to gather data for evaluation. The observation instrument was to be used as a tool for

providing formative feedback for improvement of teaching. We proposed that an observation instrument should:

1. be simple enough to be completed easily by the observer;
2. be a device for gathering objective data so that post-observation conferencing would be focused on teacher behaviors and not personalities or superfluous performance;
3. use terms which describe behaviors clearly;
4. clearly delineate between objective and subjective criteria;
5. indicate important criteria (things to look for).

In addition, session presiders recommended that an appropriate observation guide be comprised of, but not limited to, components for each of the following criteria:

1. lesson planning (to include creativity and individual differences);
2. teaching techniques (to include variety);
3. interpersonal skills (rapport);
4. classroom management;
5. special needs students;
6. evaluation of pupil learning;
7. physical environment;
8. basic skills;
9. knowledge of subject matter;

10. the intangibles of professionalism;

11. comments (to include strengths, weaknesses, and suggestions for improvement).

Step Two

After the brief overview (Step One), workshop participants were divided into groups of four to six teachers. Each group was assigned the task of generating descriptive criteria for expectations of student teachers based on the effective teaching research reviewed in the "Effective Teaching (Overview)" session and reflecting the criteria outlined in Step One.

Step Three

After Step Two, packets of several sample observation guides were distributed. The guides ranged from extremely detailed (describing specific teacher competencies) to extremely open-ended (a blank sheet of paper for summative comments). Session presiders quickly reviewed each instrument after which the groups discussed the relative merits of the various guides based upon descriptive criteria generated in Step Two.

Step Four

Following Step Three, each participant was directed to construct an observation guide, choose an observation guide from the packet, or combine parts of several guides based upon their own criteria. Once each participant had an observation guide, they were asked to explain it to their

groups. Group members had the responsibility of reacting to each guide according to the criteria from Steps One and Two, and giving critical, constructive feedback.

Step Five

The final phase of the session was to have participants refine their observation guides based on the feedback they received.

Throughout the session, we tried to maintain a low profile, keeping our presentations brief and to the point. We wanted participants to see each other as resources. We were there as clarifiers and consultants, not as ultimate authorities. We wanted the end result to be an observation guide that would be of their making rather than ours.

OBSERVATION: USING THE INSTRUMENT

Knowing that one will never fully understand or own something until one actually uses it, the next session was titled "Using the Instrument". Participants practiced using their observation guides in a simulated experience. They viewed video-taped vignettes of classroom performances of what might be considered the typical student teacher. Each vignette lasted approximately fifteen minutes, and was chosen so that a majority of the participants would be unfamiliar with the subject matter. The rationale behind that decision was to encourage a focus on generic teaching methodologies rather than content.

CONFERENCING AND FEEDBACK

To round out the simulated observation experience, the teaching episodes were used for a role play of a post observation conference. Participants were engaged in a discussion of how conferences should be conducted. Questions were raised about where and when conferences should be held, how various common problems should be addressed and what should be the intended outcome of conferences.

After participants had reflected upon those general questions they were divided into pairs in a way that half, one for each pair took the role of cooperating teachers while the other student teachers. They were directed to conduct a conference in a ten minute period. After that first round the pairs were reconfigured and a second round was conducted using the second teaching episode as a topic. It was arranged so each participant experienced the role of teacher and the role of student teacher.

IDEA EXCHANGES

Interspersed among the sessions concerned with the construction, use of, and feedback from observation instruments were three "Idea Exchanges".

The first idea exchange was aimed at developing a "Guide for Cooperating Teachers." Participants were asked to brainstorm those things which they felt were necessary for cooperating teachers to do to set the stage for a

successful student teaching experience. This brainstorming was done in small groups followed by a large group sharing of ideas. To facilitate the effort, participants were given a worksheet containing areas to be considered. These included:

1. orientation of the student teacher to the school;
2. observation in the classroom;
3. induction of the student teacher into the teaching role;
4. instructional planning;
5. teaching itself;
6. evaluation and conferencing.

Idea Exchange Two followed the session entitled "Post-Observation: Conferencing and Feedback Techniques". It consisted of a series of questions to be discussed . These questions were designed to elicit participant responses regarding their perceptions of various aspects of student teaching. They were asked what things were lacking in student teaching. What are the responsibilities of the various parties involved? How can all the aspects of the process be evaluated? The specific questions changed with each workshop depending on what areas we felt needed clarification. These responses were also used to modify various facets of future workshops.

The third and final idea exchange varied in each workshop. Twice, it turned out to be a continuation of discussions from the second idea exchange. In another workshop, the final session was facilitated by the MSU Director of Student Teaching and focused on the university's expectations of the cooperating teacher and the cooperating teacher's expectations of the university. Probably the most successful and highly rated session was facilitated by a career planning and placement offical. His focus was on the writing of letters for the student teachers' placement files. He presented samples of good, neutral, and "red flag" letters. Following his presentation of each letter, participants discussed, under the guidance of the facilitator, the merits of what was written.

SUMMARY

Following the conclusion of the last idea exchange, the facilitators summarized the workshop and asked participants to complete an evaluation questionnaire. The instrument used a seven point Likert scale with a one as low and seven as high. In all workshops, the average ratings centered at six.

Future offerings of the workshop are planned and, pending funding, a follow up workshop focus on other areas of student teaching will be developed.

It is our hope that sometime in the future, only those teachers who have completed the workshops will be allowed to

work with our student teachers. It will serve as a basis for certification for cooperating teachers.

Further information on the workshop and materials used in the workshop can be obtained by contacting any of the authors.

Reference

Copas, E.M. (1984). Critical requirements for cooperating teachers, Journal of Teacher Education, 35 (6), 49-54.

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory Effective Schooling Practices: A Research Synthesis.300 SW Sixth Ave, Portland, Oregon 97204. April, 1984